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A COMEDY ON MARRIAGE AND SOME EARLY
ANTI-MASQUES, MARCH 5, 1565.

IT is known from a document preserved in the State Paper Office that on Shrovetide (March 4 and 5), 1565, 'showes' by the Gentlemen of Gray's Inn and 'masks' were given before the Queen.¹ This document, which is an estimate for the revels, says nothing of the substance of these shows and masques; it has to do only with the properties used in representing them. In the *Calendar of State Papers*, however, is a letter, in which Guzman de Silva, the Spanish ambassador, gives King Phillip some interesting comments on the merry-making and entertainments of March 5. This rather gossipy letter preserves some specific account of one of the 'showes' by the Gentlemen of Gray's Inn and of two 'masks' which occurred the same evening. Under the date of March 12, 1565, De Silva writes:²

'On the 5th instant the party of the earl of Leicester gave a supper to the Queen in the palace, which was the wager their opponents had won of them on the previous day. The French Ambassador with Margaret and the other of the principal ladies supped with the Queen, as is usual on such occasions.

¹This document is listed under the date of 1565, in the *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series, 1547-1580*. Edited by Robert Lemon. London, 1856, p. 250. It was first printed by George Chalmers in his *Apology*. London, 1797, p. 354.

²See *Calendar of State Papers: Spanish Department, 1558-1567*. London, 1892, p. 400. A letter of De Silva's, written to the Duchess of Parma and dated August 19, 1564, throws some light on the plays at Cambridge during the Queen's visit to the University in that month. See *Calendar of State Papers: Spanish Department* (as above), p. 375.

There was a joust and a tourney on horseback afterwards.¹ The challengers were the earl of Leicester, the earl of Sussex, and Hunsdon When it was ended the Queen entered her apartments asking me, if I was not tired, to stay and see the rest of the rejoicing for the day. She left Viscount Montague and her Vice-Chamberlain with me until the earl of Leicester disarmed, when the rest of the guests and I went to his apartments to supper. When this was ended all went to the Queen's rooms and descended to where all was prepared for the representation of a Comedy in English, of which I understood just so much as the Queen told me. The plot was founded on the question of marriage, discussed between Juno and Diana, Juno advocating marriage, and Diana chastity. Jupiter gave a verdict in favour of matrimony after many things had passed on both sides in defence of the respective arguments. The Queen turned to me and said, "This is all against me." After the comedy there was a masquerade of satyrs, or wild gods, who danced with the ladies, and when this was finished there entered 10 parties of 12 gentlemen each, the same who had fought in the foot tourney, and these, all armed as they were, danced with the ladies—a very novel ball, surely. After this the Queen went up to her apartments again where they had spread a very large table in the presence chamber with many sorts of cakes, confitures, and preserves, and in one part of it there were herrings and other small fishes in memory of the principle of Lent. The Queen asked whether I would eat anything, and on my replying that I would not she laughed and said, "I understand you very well and will not cheat you, 12 o'clock has struck," and with that she entered her chamber not very tired to all appearance, although the entertainment had been so long. She said how much she wished your Majesty had been present, and she could entertain and feast you here.'

With this extract from De Silva's letter, especially the part concerning the comedy, should be compared the following item

¹ *I. e.*, the tourney came after the joust, but both, of course, before supper.

in the estimate before mentioned which specifies the charges for 'payntars workinge uppon the Townes and Charretts for the Goodesses and div^{rs} devisses as the Hevens and Clowds.' Opposite the item stand marginal notes; one 'Gentillmen of the Innes of Court,' and the other 'Diana Pallas.' These details about the properties and stage setting fit admirably with what De Silva reports of the comedy, and the marginal note 'Diana Pallas' makes the identification perfectly sure.

This comedy on marriage, the moral of which Elizabeth so frankly accepted, is only one more evidence of the great agitation of the English people as to who the successor to the throne would be, in case their Queen should die unmarried. All classes desired the Queen's marriage, and this play was only an expression of the universal wish. The fact that here the argument was so plainly directed toward the Queen, helps one to believe that in Edward's Palaemon and Arcyte (1566) Emilia's marriage to Palaemon allegorized the desired marriage of Elizabeth, as Lyly's Endymion later allegorized her relations with Dudley.

II.

De Silva's description of the masqueraders, though interesting, is meagre. Yet from it, from the estimate already referred to, and from some masks cited in Kempe's *Losely MMS*,¹ I wish to construct a case for an early appearance of the anti-masque. According to Soergel,² the anti-masque did not make its appearance till 1608 in Ben Jonson's *Hue and Cry after Cupid*. Soergel of course is speaking of the anti-masque as a part of the developed literary masque, the *Maskenspiel*, and is not specially interested in the long line of court masques that preceded the establishment of the literary form. Yet it is likely that the early literary elements of the masque, though

¹ *The Losely MMS*, edited by A. J. Kempe, London, 1836.

² *Die Englischen Maskenspiele*, A. Soergel, Halle, 1882, p. 46.

most traces of them are lost, go back farther than we ordinarily think. And similarly if it can be shown that these court entertainments of Mary's time and the early years of Elizabeth constituted real anti-masques (except for the element of dialogue), the final form of the masques of Ben Jonson will be more easily understood, because of our knowing this early stage in the growth of this important element in the artistic effect of the later master-pieces.

The anti-masque consists essentially 1) of 'antick' personages, 2) who perform grotesque dances of wild, swift, irregular or leaping motion; and 3) the purpose of both the costume and the dance is to emphasize by contrast the beauty and stateliness of the regular masque. Dialogue was, of course, a later outgrowth from these essential features.

In this 'masquerade of satyrs or wild gods' in 1565 one element of the anti-masque was *certainly* present, viz., that of fantastic personages. Soergel speaks of examples of antick figures on the popular stage before 1608—as in Munday's *John a' Kent and John a' Cumber* and Greene's *James the Fourth*. There were such 'anticks,' however, in the court masques at a far earlier period, as in this one described by De Silva; and even earlier when, in the reign of Mary, George Ferrers was the popular 'Lord of Misrule' at the Christmas festivities. In *The Losely MMS* is found a note of properties required for some of Ferrers' entertainments, among which are the following:

'Item, agaynste this night VIII visars for a drunken maske, and VIII swords and daggers for ye same purpose' (p. 28). Again a masque 'of apes and cats for a mask of bagpipes to sit on' (p. 87). Again there is to be a 'maske of greek worthies,' and Ferrers requires '6 pair of oxen leggs and counterfett feete for satyrs, being torchberers for the same mask' (p. 88). Still again, a masque of 'Medyoxes,' a name given to figure half man, half death. Here are certainly antick figures enough; and as early as 1552.

Besides fantastic costuming, it is quite possible that another

antic element was present in these masques of drunken men, satyrs, medyoxes, and wild gods. There may well have been in the measure of the dances that swift, wild, ludicrous or unusual motion, which, in its sharp contrast with the stately elegance of the masque proper, constitutes an essential characteristic of the Jacobean anti-masque. Such fantastic creatures would scarcely dance otherwise. De Silva speaks of the wild gods and men-at-arms as dancing with the ladies, but it is not unlikely that in both masques the performers after the custom in vogue for many years, first danced the previously rehearsed measures of the particular masque and then joined with the ladies of the audience in the simpler popular lavoltos and corantos of the day. This, then, gives us the second element of the anti-masque.

But what of the element of contrast, which is also essential? Are these 'antick' masques of strangely customed and swiftly moving figures used to set off the stately dances of other beautiful and graceful masques? In the masque of oxenfooted satyrs who acted as torchbearers to the masque of 'Greek worthies,' Ferrers must surely have consciously used the principle of contrast for his effect. In the case of the entertainment of 1565 a rather tenuous web of proof may be woven to show that the idea of contrast was apprehended there also. The argument is confessedly filmy. A sort of contrast there was very evidently,—the contrast of wild gods and men-at-arms dancing with the court ladies,—but I shall try to show that a contrast of the sort used by Ferrers, a contrast of masque with masque, was purposed.

In the estimate of expenses, referred to above in connection with the comedy on marriage, occurs this description of the properties for the Shrovetide masques: '*and four masks too of them not occupied nor sene wth thare hole furniture w^{ch} be verie fayr and Riche off old stuff but new garnished wth frence and tassells to seme new,*' etc.¹ The maker of the estimate, of course,

¹ Italics mine.

would be careful to mention particularly the items of expense for those two masques which were not seen, lest the money should seem to have gone for nothing; hence it may be taken for granted that it was the costuming of the two masques *not* presented that was 'verie fayr and Riche.' Now the Shrove-tide festivities certainly included Monday, March 4th, as well as Tuesday, March 5th, and it must be admitted that these two richly costumed masques which never came off may have been scheduled for Monday's entertainment as well as for Tuesday's which we are considering. However, it is quite possible that the Master of Revels meant them to be presented along with the two masques of Tuesday night which De Silva mentions, but that the unexpected supper given by the party of the Earl of Leicester (which was, as De Silva says, 'the wager their opponents had won of them on the previous day') threw out the calculations of the worthy Magister—and compelled him to omit part of his entertainment. He was not long in deciding what to leave out. It was a quick choice between 1) the two masques, staled by custom, the properties of which were 'fayr and Riche,' but also 'off old stuff'; and 2) the two masques which were shown for the first time, fantastic and full of novelty.

Hence one can see how, instead of two fantastic performances, the original plan may have embraced four masques: the first a masque of satyrs with a wild, antic dance, followed by the conventional stately masque, then another odd fantastic dance of the men in armor followed in its turn by another stately masque and dance with the ladies. That would have amounted practically to two ordinary masques each preceded by an anti-masque similar in essential elements to the anti-masque of Ben Jonson and the Jacobeans. Since something had to be omitted however the conventional masques were cut out and the others left, the particular element of contrast being sacrificed to that of novelty.

This explanation is advanced only tentatively. But from the combined weight of this case taken with the earlier masque

of Ferrers, we are pretty safe in believing that the idea of contrast was commonly employed even in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Thus it is seen that the anti-masque with its three essential features of fantastic customing, swift antic dances, and the notion of contrast was established in England before Ben Jonson was born; and by the time he was ready to use it in the *Hue and Cry after Cupid*, it had no doubt developed till it was fit to his hand. Jonson's fame as chief of English masque writers is so secure that the fact that he was only the developer of the already existing anti-masque can not detract from it. Nor can the obscure but fertile-witted George Ferrers with certainty be given the credit for the first one; since many similar entertainments may have preceded his fantastic masque of satyrs, torch-bearers to the masque of Greek worthies.

One further point may be noted: the actors in the Jacobean anti-masques were usually hired professionals; those in these earlier ones were evidently gentlemen of the court, else they would not have danced with the ladies, as De Silva reports they did.

W. Y. DURAND.